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Secretary Haig

# NATO and Restoring U.S. Leadership

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*Following is a commencement address by Secretary Haig before Syracuse University in New York on May 9, 1981.*

Graduation is a time for rejoicing. It should also be a time for introspection when we examine our directions in life, both as individuals and as a nation. This morning, with your indulgence, I would like to say a few words about America and where America is going, particularly our foreign policy. And I want to call your attention specifically to one of our most precious legacies—the Atlantic alliance.

Americans have been described as a people constantly in search of themselves. The vast number of schools and colleges, adult and home-education courses, tell a story of a relentless desire for self-improvement. We are not satisfied with the present. As President Reagan has described it so well, we are dreamers of a better future.

All of us know that in recent years, we have spent a great deal of time and effort examining our society with a critical eye. Observers from abroad described us as confused, lacking in confidence, and unsure of our purposes. The most fundamental questions were asked: Did our democratic institutions still work? Were they worth defending? Could we offer anything to the world? Was the dream over?

I believe this period of a perhaps excessive American introspection has come to an end. We are more certain of ourselves today than we have been for a long time. A profound national consensus has emerged. Our democratic institutions work. They are worth defending.

Our ideals and our liberty do offer a notable example to a world desperately searching for peace and prosperity. The dream lives.

This consensus, this reassertion of American self-confidence is the very basis of the President's foreign policy. Our objectives are straightforward: We want a world hospitable to our society and ideals. And our objectives can be achieved if we restore American leadership.

## Major Points in U.S. Approach

Let me give you a sense of our direction by discussing briefly four major points in our approach.

- First, our insistence on restraint and reciprocity in East-West relations;
- Second, our determination to strengthen our alliances, particularly the Atlantic alliance;
- Third, our intention to play a constructive role in the Third World; and
- Fourth, our firm resolve to strengthen our economy and our defenses.

**Restraint of Soviet Union.** An insistence on restraint and reciprocity in East-West relations is the central theme of our foreign policy. If we are seriously interested in a world where there can be peaceful change, where nations can settle disputes short of war, then we must act to restrain the Soviet Union. Soviet actions or the actions of Moscow's surrogates threaten Western strategic interests. Even more importantly, it is Soviet reliance on force and the threat

of force to create and exploit disorder that undermines the prospect for world peace today.

**Reinvigoration of Alliances.** The next point must be to strengthen our alliances, especially the Atlantic alliance. The beginning of wisdom is to establish the consensus and confidence with our allies that has been missing in recent years. The key to this is genuine consultation, which has several elements. We must be good listeners; we must be frank with one another; we must work for the common good; and we should give each other the benefit of the doubt. Candor will serve the alliance well, but surely it will be more effective in quiet diplomacy than through the medium of public criticism.

**Approach to Third World.** The third point is our intention to play an active and constructive role in the Third World. It is important to do this for our own interests. Just as important, how-

We have no monopoly on wisdom in approaching this complex situation. Still, we must prevent the Soviets and their surrogates from destroying what the West and the developing countries can achieve together.

**Strengthening U.S. Economy and Defenses.** Finally, the fourth element in the President's approach is the restoration of the economic vitality and military strength of the United States. This is as crucial to foreign policy as it is to domestic purpose. Without a healthy American economy, we cannot strengthen our leadership abroad. Without an improved American military capability, we cannot restrain the Soviet Union.

Restraint of the Soviets, reinvigoration of our alliances, a new approach to the Third World, a healthier U.S. economy and a stronger military—these are the signals of our determination to restore our leadership in the world. It is going to be very difficult, and we cannot

do not exalt the military virtues. It is a highly successful deterrent to war, yet its very success makes it easy to take NATO—and peace—for granted.

The alliance survives these paradoxes because the Atlantic family of nations is inspired by a common faith in the capacity of all men for self-government. No hereditary aristocracy, no religious orthodoxy, no master race, no privileged class, no gang of terrorists has a right to rule a people by force. As free peoples, we obey the laws passed by governments we have freely chosen. Our military forces take orders from elected civilian authority. Our young people enjoy freedom of thought, able to question even the worth of their own societies. These deeply held principles lead us to oppose aggression, tyranny, and terrorism.

A clear contrast exists between NATO and the Soviet-dominated Warsaw Pact. NATO is a voluntary defensive alliance pledged to strengthen free institutions and designed to deter aggression. The Warsaw Pact's armed forces have been used principally to deprive their own peoples of the right of self-government.

A similar contrast between the values of NATO and the values of the Soviet Union may be seen on East-West exchanges. The Soviets are anxious to import Western credit, Western technology, Western consumer goods and machinery, and Western food to save their system from its economic failures. The most controlled Soviet export, however, is human talent, those who wish to vote with their feet for opportunity in the West.

In fact, the Soviet system is showing signs of spiritual exhaustion. We are proud of our artists, scientists, and social critics; theirs are censored, exiled, sent on false pretenses to mental institutions, or condemned to forced labor. We are proud of the life of the mind to which Syracuse University is a living monument. The Soviets are afraid of the intellectual and spiritual life of their peoples.

The commitment of the allied countries to peace and freedom inspires not only our common response to the crisis in Poland but also our work in the Conference on Security and Cooperation (the Helsinki accords) in Europe on behalf of individual rights and contact between peoples. The Atlantic nations constitute an enduring natural community with many cultural, economic, and organizational links beside NATO itself. NATO lives because it is rooted in the ideals of this community. The alliance speaks to our deeply cherished beliefs.

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ever, we should do our part for the well-being of the developing countries.

An American approach to the Third World clearly requires an acknowledgment of the problem presented by Soviet policy. But this acknowledgment must come on a foundation of understanding for the problems facing the developing countries. The West has a great deal to offer: economic and technical assistance, cooperation in the settlement of disputes, access to an international commercial and financial system. We have also shown through the example of our own societies that freedom and economic development are compatible.

The approach from the East is different. Moscow offers a poor model of economic achievement, and the Soviets disclaim any obligation to give financial assistance to the developing countries. Instead, the Soviet Union and its surrogates are heavily involved in stoking conflict with arms and troops. The names and places have become familiar to us over the past decade: the Cubans fighting in Africa, the Vietnamese conquering Kampuchea. More recently, we have seen the Soviets themselves invade Afghanistan and the Libyans seize Chad. And in our own hemisphere, there is incontrovertible evidence that Soviet arms are threatening an established government in El Salvador.

accomplish our objectives alone. In this age of interdependence, freedom and peace depend upon concerted action between the United States and its allies. Having just returned from a consultation with the NATO allies in Rome, I want to review briefly the prospects for a reinvigorated Atlantic alliance.

### Prospects for NATO

Finding fault with the Atlantic alliance has become a good-sized industry, giving employment to thousands of critics on both sides of the ocean. When we examine the assets of the Atlantic allies, however, a more promising picture emerges. We have the talent and the wealth among us to maintain a favorable balance of power with the Soviet Union. We can work together to restrain Soviet interventionism abroad. But we can do these things only if we think seriously about the alliance itself. We must remember why it was founded, what holds it together, and why it is crucial to the future—especially your future. An entire generation has grown up with NATO as much a fact of life as the electric light. You who do not know a world without NATO will soon take up the burdens of my generation.

NATO today presents two paradoxes. It is a military alliance uniting nations whose way of life and principles

Do we still need the Atlantic alliance? Secretary of State Dean Acheson explained the need for NATO to the American people in 1949 by saying that it was "the statement of the facts and lessons of history." Two world wars had shown that aggression aimed at the domination of Europe threatened the survival of the United States and inevitably involved us in war. Out of this bitter experience, we abandoned our historic policy of aloofness from European alliances. Our participation in NATO remains essential to the task of keeping the peace in Europe.

Allied strength and unity, not lack of Soviet ambition, have protected us. And allied weakness or disunity may tempt the Soviets. Indeed, we face today perhaps a more complicated challenge than was contemplated by the founders of NATO. The Soviet Union today is a power with a global military reach. Soviet forces are stronger than our own in some categories. And Soviet surrogates in Africa, Asia, and Central America, have been exploiting conflicts to the detriment of both the local peoples and Western strategic interests.

We should not exaggerate the strength of our adversary. Moscow faces an unenviable present and a gloomy future. A list of formidable problems confronts it, ranging from the hostility of China to the difficult Polish situation, from economic failures to ideological

sterility. But these weaknesses should not make us too comfortable. A state as powerful and ambitious as the Soviet Union may be more dangerous because its weaknesses run to the heart of its system. That is why the first task of American leadership and the Atlantic alliance is to establish new restraints on Soviet behavior.

### Recent Progress

Let me conclude by reporting to you on the recent progress we have made toward strengthening the alliance. At a meeting of NATO's North Atlantic Council earlier this week in Rome, we reaffirmed alliance solidarity and our belief in the values of Western democracy. In formal sessions and a host of informal meetings, the NATO governments freely achieved a consensus in order to bolster the common defense. Our approach reflected a very realistic Western attitude toward the problems of arms modernization and arms control. In announcing that negotiations with the Soviet Union on limiting theater nuclear weapons could commence by the end of the year, we and our allies demonstrated that free peoples were not afraid to talk with an adversary. In agreeing, at the same time, that NATO would modernize its defenses, the alliance also showed that negotiations must be supported by a sound military posture.

This is only the beginning, of course, but already a change for the better can be detected in the spirit of our cooperation. Clearly our allies welcome a more robust American leadership, informed by a more sensitive appreciation of their problems.

Today is also a beginning for you. You have heard me patiently—perhaps not so patiently—talk about ideals and identity, leadership and alliance, danger and opportunity. Your future is in your own hands. But the intangibles of Western civilization, the inner strengths, the real intellectual and spiritual treasures of free men are also in your hands. Cherish those things and cherish the instrument of their protection, the Atlantic alliance. Perhaps Benjamin Disraeli captured the moment of your graduation best when he wrote that "the youth of the nation are the trustees of posterity." It is my privilege today to wish you the very best as you commence your trusteeship. ■

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